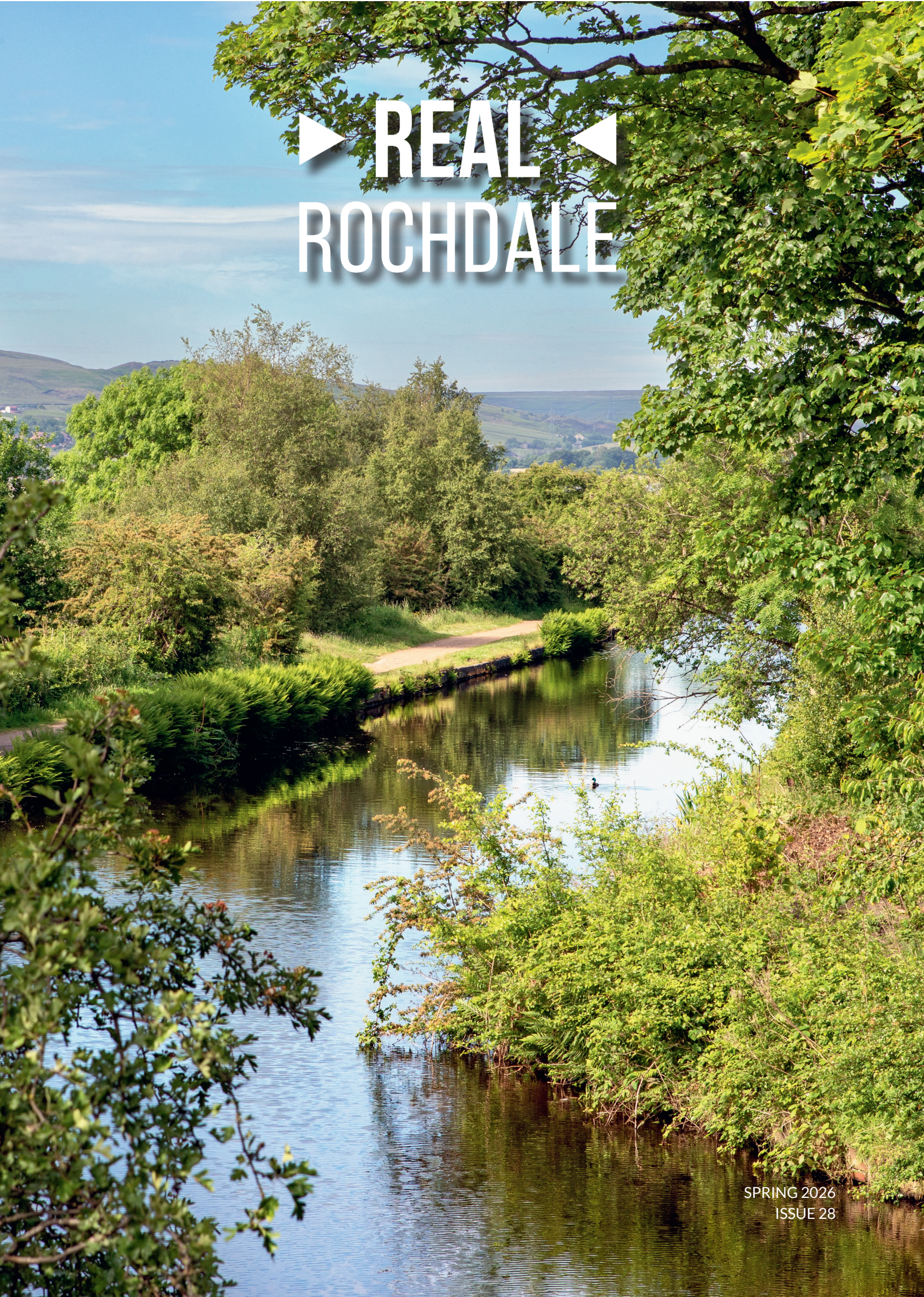




► REAL ◀ ROCHDALE

SPRING 2026
ISSUE 28



Greg Couzens

Welcome to Real Rochdale magazine

This is the fourth quarterly magazine we have published since I took over as editor of Real Rochdale magazine and once again it is packed with features about the people, places, businesses and organisations in the Borough of Rochdale.

I visited Ebor Studio in Littleborough to find out more about Kara Lyons, who is currently working on a sculpture of Mayor Janet Emsley.

Nikki Staley spoke to Karen Boardman, Rochdale Development Agency's music manager - read about Karen's fascinating musical background on pages four and five.

Over the past year Roch Valley Radio launched a volunteer-led news service on its website, keeping local reporting alive across the borough at a time when independent coverage was disappearing.

Rochdale's streets were transformed into an immersive night-time light and audio experience as hundreds of residents and visitors explored the town as it's never been seen before - see pages 34 and 35.

As you can see on the contents page, there is much more to read - I hope you enjoy doing so.

Greg

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COMMUNITY STATION

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KAREN BOARDMAN

THE WOMAN PUTTING ROCHDALE BACK ON THE MUSICAL MAP

by Nikki Staley

Walk into a conversation with Karen Boardman and it quickly becomes clear music isn't just something she works with, it's something she lives and breathes. As Rochdale's Music Development Manager at the Rochdale Development Agency (RDA), Karen is helping to shape a bold new chapter for the borough's cultural life, drawing on decades of experience at the very heart of the UK music industry.

Karen's story begins long before her Rochdale role. Leaving school at 16, she went straight into work, but music was already pulling her in. Through friendships and chance encounters, she found herself immersed in Manchester's post-punk explosion, watching bands like Joy Division evolve from rehearsal rooms to global influence. A job at the legendary Hacienda followed, where she worked behind the bar by day and helped bands load in by night, gaining an invaluable backstage education in how live music really works.

That curiosity led Karen to London and into the record industry, working at London Records during a golden era of hit singles and landmark albums. From Fine Young Cannibals to Salt-N-Pepa, she saw first-hand how artists, managers, promoters and labels fit together. Eventually, she became a manager herself, spending years nurturing talent, organising tours and helping bands build sustainable careers.

After returning to the Northwest, Karen's career took on a new dimension. Working in music development roles across Greater Manchester, including eight years at Arts Council England, she began focusing not just on artists, but on places. She saw how strong music infrastructure, venues, promoters, studios, skills and support, could transform towns, attract young people and create pride.

That belief is at the heart of her work in Rochdale. Since joining the RDA, Karen has been quietly but relentlessly building the foundations of a thriving local music scene. She has mapped the borough's musical landscape, uncovering more than 80 bands and artists, dozens of venues and a network of passionate grassroots organisations. Her approach is hands-on: offering one-to-one advice, helping people secure funding, supporting new promoters and encouraging venues to take creative risks.



Karen with Doves band members Jez and Andy Williams

Her flagship project, Rochdale Music Stories, brings the borough's rich musical heritage together with its next generation of talent. From Joy Division and Happy Mondays to today's emerging artists, the project celebrates the recordings made in Rochdale while re-imagining them through new voices. It's about honouring the past without being trapped by it, and ensuring Rochdale's story keeps evolving.

Karen is also deeply committed to access and inclusion. Alongside her RDA role, she supports initiatives encouraging women into music and backstage roles, challenging the industry's stubborn gender imbalance. For her, authenticity matters, "if you're talking to musicians and venues, you need to understand their reality".

Despite juggling multiple projects, and doing it all part-time, Karen remains driven by one simple motivation: creativity. "It's the ideas people bring every day," she says. "Music can change lives, and it can change places."

Thanks to Karen Boardman's passion, experience and sheer graft, Rochdale isn't just remembering its musical past - it's building a future worth listening to.

Kara Lyons

Sculpting Community, Culture and Creative Resilience

Kara Lyons is a renowned sculptor, artist and the director of Ebor Studio in Littleborough. With a distinguished academic career spanning 22 years, Kara taught at a number of universities before turning her focus towards creating a space where artists could thrive beyond institutional walls, that vision became Ebor Studio.

Founded in 2012, Ebor Studio began with an ambitious programme of creative events, aimed at bringing artists and the wider community together.

Over time, it evolved into a vibrant artistic hub, now supporting 14 artists in residence with dedicated studio space, alongside a further 16 associate members. In 2018, the opening of the Ebor Gallery marked a significant milestone, enabling the studio to host exhibitions and further amplify the voices of diverse contemporary artists.

Central to Kara's ethos is collaboration. Through partnerships with organisations such as Touchstones Rochdale, Ebor Studio has successfully brought together artists from a wide range of backgrounds, fostering dialogue, experimentation and shared practice.

This commitment to inclusivity and partnership has helped position Ebor as an important cultural presence in the region.

Like many arts organisations, Ebor Studio faced significant challenges during the Covid-19 lockdowns.

However, under Kara's leadership, adversity became an opportunity for innovation.

The studio responded by developing a virtual tour, launching a comprehensive website, and later introducing the striking Ebor Billboard publication on the side of the building.

This highly visible platform allows artists to showcase their work and promote events, ensuring creativity remained accessible even during periods of physical isolation.

Beyond bricks and mortar, Kara has cultivated something less tangible but equally powerful: a strong, family-like community. Ebor Studio is widely recognised as a supportive and collaborative environment, where artists are encouraged to grow, share and support one another. This sense of belonging has become one of the studio's defining strengths.



Kara's artistic practice continues alongside her directorial role. Her latest project is the creation of a sculpted bust of the Mayor of Rochdale, Janet Emsley. Commissioned by Rochdale Development Agency, the work has been developed through a series of sittings and extensive photographic study. The project represents both a personal and civic commission, capturing character as well as public significance.

With the bust nearing completion, it stands as yet another example of Kara Lyons' ability to balance artistic excellence with community engagement. Through her sculpture, leadership and unwavering commitment to artists, Kara continues to shape not only materials, but also the cultural landscape of Littleborough and beyond.

MICHAEL BAMFORD - MAN OF ROCHDALE

Current 'Man of Rochdale' Michael Bamford is the founder of Reuse Littleborough and won the award in recognition of his tireless efforts to support those in need both locally and abroad.

Through his non-profit organisation Reuse Littleborough, Michael and his team of dedicated volunteers collect and redistribute second-hand goods to help people who may not be able to afford everyday essentials.

The project serves struggling families in the Rochdale borough and also supports children overseas, with an emphasis on sustainable giving and reducing landfill waste.



Reuse Littleborough was launched in 2015 with the aim to support abandoned babies in Mwanza Tanzania. Amy Hathaway MBE had set up a baby rescue home and Reuse Littleborough filled a 40 foot container to send.

Having started operating from a cupboard with no lights, Rochdale Boroughwide Housing provided a shop in Smallbridge.

In June 2018, Reuse Littleborough took on the abandoned Royal Oak Pub, with plans to help local families, children and babies.

Having been granted charity status, a resource centre was created and a large van, staffed by a team of drivers, was sourced to collect furniture donations.

A baby shop on Hare Hill Road is very popular, and the main hub, which is now on Church Street, Littleborough, has donations arriving daily.

Reuse Littleborough is keen to spread the message of the importance of recycling, with presentations to schools, community groups, church groups, and business associations. Please get in touch if you would be interested in hosting a talk: reuselittleborough@gmail.com - 01706 334112

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IAN MADELEY DEPUTY LIEUTENANT OF GREATER MANCHESTER

Ian Madeley was commissioned as a Deputy Lieutenant in 2025.

Serving Deputy Lieutenants of Greater Manchester assist the Lord-Lieutenant in her duties. They undertake various tasks such as attending all Citizenship Ceremonies throughout the county, making cheque presentations, giving talks and other duties as determined by the Lord-Lieutenant.

Ian Madeley, born in Oldham, has lived and worked in Rochdale for 30 years and established an independent, commercial insurance broking business in 2013. Ian chooses to work with local people and local businesses.

Volunteering has always been a way of life, early activities were around teaching life saving skills from the age of 13, qualifying as an examiner at age 16.

An introduction to Rotaract led into Rotary and Freemasonry.

Ian believes voluntary service and volunteers are the backbone and lifeblood of any community or society and he has been actively involved with many charities over the years.

He also continually encourages others to get involved, while maintaining that “one should never give an hour more, or a pound more, than your personal circumstances permit”.

This is a guiding principle that Ian believes “encourages engagement in a sustainable way, that ultimately benefits more deserving causes”.

He added: “If you give an hour and encourage a friend or associate to do the same, within a very small circle, a day of service is achieved quite easily, that day is priceless to any charity.

“Helping someone each day, in any way, large or small, makes it a good day.”



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JULIA HEAP AWARDED OBE

The Principal and CEO of Hopwood Hall College has been awarded an OBE – 30 years after starting her career as an apprentice.

Julia Heap, who's been at the helm of the award-winning college since 2019, was named on the King's New Year's Honours List.

She received the prestigious accolade in recognition of her outstanding contributions to skills and Further Education.

Hopwood Hall, which has campuses in Middleton and Rochdale town centre, has seen remarkable and consistent growth under Julia's leadership – sparked by her fervent commitment to widening participation for people of all ages and from all backgrounds.

It's this commitment that led to the college being presented with the Queen's Anniversary Prize in 2024 for its trauma-informed approach to widening participation.

Julia began her own career 30 years ago as a 22-year-old apprentice in Oldham.

It was this personal experience that shaped her outlook on education and the ways it could be used to transform lives and communities.

The mum-of-three has since become a passionate advocate for technical education, apprenticeships, skills-based training and lifelong learning.

Julia said: "Undoubtedly, education has the power to change lives; it changed mine as an adult apprentice – and for that I'll always be a passionate advocate for the transformative impact of gaining new skills at any stage of life.

"I'm delighted to be playing a role in raising aspirations alongside such incredible colleagues, governors, employer partners, and, of course, the brilliant students who are the heart and soul of our college community."

For Julia, the New Year's Honours List is the culmination of a 30-year journey that has seen her go from apprentice to principal and CEO, to Officer of the Order of the British Empire.





The new auditorium features retractable seating, better lighting, sound and ventilation. L-R: Chris Coleman, deputy CEO of Your Trust, Councillor Sue Smith, cabinet member for communities and cooperation at Rochdale Borough Council, Penny Thompson, relationships manager at Arts Council England, and Councillor Neil Emmott, leader of Rochdale Borough Council



Heywood Civic has been transformed with a new frontage

HEYWOOD CIVIC REDEVELOPMENT

A multi-million pound redevelopment has transformed Heywood Civic into a modern, accessible space that will host a full programme of events and community activity. The venue will offer comedy, theatre, music and more, alongside a range of community-led events.

The Civic, which first opened its doors in 1966, temporarily closed in December 2024 to enable refurbishment to take place.

The centre has benefitted from a large glass fronted extension at the front to create a new bar and cafe, new and additional changing areas to enable the staging of bigger shows than ever before and retractable seating, to create a more flexible community space in the auditorium.

Further upgrades to the performance area have improved lighting, sound and ventilation to create a better audience experience, while more accessible facilities, including a Changing Places facility, will ensure that this well-loved cultural space can be used by everybody.

Local arts organisation, Cartwheel Arts, will now be based in the building with space to put on community arts projects and workshops in the heart of Heywood.

The redevelopment of Heywood Civic is part of the wider regeneration of Heywood. A separate project, run by the Heywood Town Board, will see £20m invested into the town over the next ten years using the government's Pride in Place funding. Peine Square, which sits immediately in front of Heywood Civic, has already been transformed using money from this fund.

Read more about the upcoming events and activities at: www.heywoodcivic.co.uk



A new bar, cafe and entrance area has been created

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PITCH REBUILD



CROWN OIL ARENA

Rochdale AFC's Crown Oil Arena pitch has undergone a major mid-season rebuild.

Drainage issues have affected the playing surface for a number of years, with several matches postponed already in the current 2025/26 season.

The severity of the problem, coupled with the club's ambition for promotion back to the English Football League (EFL), saw them commit to a challenging pitch rebuild.

The work began just days after Dale's home match against Southend United was abandoned in early December, with the existing surface and sub-base dug up entirely.

New drainage channels and a new gravel base were laid before Christmas, after which period work began to apply an upper root zone and level the pitch.

The new turf, which was harvested in Lincolnshire alongside turf for Wembley Stadium's pitch renovation, was then brought to Rochdale and installed ahead of Dale's return to the Crown Oil Arena on Saturday 24 January, when they defeated Truro City 2-0.

Rochdale AFC managing director Andy Duff commented: "I would like to put on record our thanks to OBI Sports and Mallinson, who have delivered a challenging pitch rebuild against a tight timeframe over the Christmas and New Year period.

"They have delivered the project ahead of time and under budget. We are grateful for their dedicated work."

ROCHDALE HORNETS SPORTING FOUNDATION

Rochdale Hornets Sporting Foundation is the official charity of Rochdale Hornets Rugby League Club.

Based at The Hive, Million Pavilion, Balderstone Park, rugby league is where it began – but the foundation's work is about using the power of sport and community to improve lives across Rochdale.

Through a growing programme of activity, a team of staff and volunteers support people to get active, connect with others, build confidence and feel part of something positive. From children with additional needs taking part in tag rugby, to adults enjoying supported walking groups, and players competing in wheelchair rugby league, the foundation works with people at every stage of life.

Recent funding has enabled the foundation to expand its reach, including:

- Wild at The Hive, transforming outdoor space to support wellbeing, biodiversity and community connection.
- Walking Through History, a guided walking group encouraging gentle activity and social connection.
- A dedicated Sensory Space at The Hive for children, young people and families.
- SEND and Learning Disability Tag Rugby, creating inclusive opportunities to play and belong.
- A long-established and successful Wheelchair Rugby League team, competing and inspiring year after year

Together, these projects reflect a clear commitment to inclusion, wellbeing and community pride.

Values

- Inclusion – Sport and activity should be accessible to everyone, regardless of age, background or ability.
- Well-being – Supporting healthier, happier lives, both physically and mentally.
- Community – Rochdale first: building pride, opportunity and connection in our town.
- Inspiration – Helping people believe in themselves and what they can achieve.

“Everything we do is powered by people – our passionate staff, our dedicated volunteers, and the individuals and families we work alongside every day.”



The Hive

The Hive at Balderstone Park is more than a building. It is a growing community space where people can meet, learn, create and take part in activities that support wellbeing and connection.

What you'll find at The Hive:

- The Café – a friendly, welcoming place to meet, chat and relax.
- Sensory Space – a calm, inclusive environment for children and young people with additional needs, and their families.
- Green Space – the base for Wild at The Hive, bringing nature, colour and wildlife back into the park.
- Creative and Community Sessions – from arts and crafts to co-design and wellbeing activities.
- Community Hub – a space for local groups and individuals to connect and collaborate.

The Hive is being shaped by the people who use it. Whether you're joining a walk, taking part in a session, supporting a project, or simply stopping by for a brew, it's a place to feel welcome and involved.

Drop in, get involved, or just enjoy the space. The Hive is for the community – now and as it continues to grow.

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ROCHDALE WELCOMED ITV'S 'AFTER THE FLOOD' BACK FOR SERIES TWO

Rochdale once again provided the backdrop for ITV's acclaimed drama After the Flood, with filming for the second series taking place in the borough throughout 2025.

The series, which was broadcast on ITV in January and February 2026, brought national attention to Rochdale's striking landscapes and diverse urban settings.

Filming took place at a range of locations, including scenes shot on the rugged moorlands of Rochdale and on various roads and streets throughout the borough.

The production received support from the Rochdale Film Office, which worked closely with the crew to facilitate filming and ensure a smooth, film friendly experience.

Rochdale Film Office, part of the borough's wider strategy to attract and support screen productions, provides a dedicated service for film, TV, and commercial shoots. The team offers:

- Location sourcing and management
- Liaison with landowners and local services
- Support with permissions and logistics
- On the ground assistance during filming

The Film Office promotes Rochdale as a versatile filming destination, showcasing everything from dramatic moorland and waterways to heritage buildings, modern architecture, and vibrant townscapes. More information is available at:

www.rochdalefilmoffice.co.uk

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KINGSWAY BUSINESS PARK



ATOM VALLEY

by Nikki Staley

What is Atom Valley - and what does it mean for Rochdale?

Rochdale has always been a place where things are made. From its industrial heritage to today's specialist manufacturers, engineering and skilled trades have long played a vital role in the borough's economy. Atom Valley builds on that strength, and positions Rochdale at the heart of Greater Manchester's next chapter of growth.

So what exactly is Atom Valley?

Atom Valley is Greater Manchester's flagship location for advanced manufacturing and industrial innovation. Centred on Rochdale and the north-east of the city region that includes Bury and Oldham, it brings together large-scale employment sites, modern manufacturing space, research facilities and skills provision to create one of the UK's most significant industrial growth areas.

The idea is simple but powerful. Manchester city centre has become a global hub for science, technology and research. Atom Valley is where those ideas are turned into real-world products, businesses and jobs, at scale. Internationally successful regions, from Boston to Munich, all combine world-class research with large industrial clusters on the edge of cities. Atom Valley gives Greater Manchester, and Rochdale in particular, that missing piece.

Why Rochdale?

Rochdale is not starting from scratch. Around 11% of the borough's workforce is already employed in manufacturing, a higher proportion than most parts of Greater Manchester and many other UK manufacturing areas. Rochdale also has strong concentrations of specialist skills in metalworking, machinery and engineering, giving it a solid industrial base on which to grow.

Atom Valley also offers something increasingly rare - space. Across its sites, there is around 500 acres of industrial land, with the potential to deliver up to 17 million square feet of modern manufacturing space, including capacity for very large facilities such as 'megafactories'. This scale is essential if businesses are to invest, expand and compete globally.

Just as importantly, Rochdale offers a competitive cost base. Industrial rents are significantly more economical than in more constrained locations closer to the city centre, helping businesses invest more in technology, skills and highly skilled jobs.

Kingsway Business Park help companies turn new ideas into commercial products, bridging the gap between research and production. This is a crucial step in keeping innovation, and its economic benefits, rooted in the local area.



The Sustainable Materials and Manufacturing Centre will be located on Kingsway Business Park

More than buildings: skills, innovation and opportunity

Atom Valley is about much more than warehouses and factories. It brings together research, innovation and skills to support businesses at every stage - from start-ups and spinouts to established manufacturers looking to grow.

Initiatives such as the Centre of Expertise in Advanced Materials and Sustainability (CEAMS) and facilities such as the Sustainable Materials and Manufacturing Centre (SMMC), located on Kingsway Business Park, help companies turn new ideas into commercial products, bridging the gap between research and production. This is a crucial step in keeping innovation, and its economic benefits, rooted in the local area.

What does it mean for residents?

For Rochdale residents, Atom Valley means better-paid, more secure jobs, stronger local supply chains and increased investment in skills and training. Advanced manufacturing has one of the highest "multiplier effects" of any sector, every job created supports many more in the wider economy, from logistics and maintenance to retail and services.

Above all, Atom Valley is about shared prosperity. By building on Rochdale's strengths and connecting them to global opportunities, it aims to ensure that future growth benefits local people, neighbourhoods and businesses, ultimately creating a stronger, more resilient borough for generations to come.

UKULELES DONATED TO LIBRARIES



The North West Ukulele Project has donated 11 ukuleles to Rochdale Borough Libraries that are available for loan to adult customers.

The instruments were donated by the project after being contacted by Carole Hamer, who works at Langley Library.

Carole said: "The scheme is about making music accessible, not everyone has the chance to pick up an instrument, and this loan scheme means anyone can give it a try."

Assistant librarian Carole first set up a beginner's class at Langley in 2024 and it proved a success, with around 15 musicians now meeting up every Thursday for practice.

They named themselves the Bookuleles and have performed at several public events, including the Middleton Christmas lights switch on.

The ukulele is often seen as an ideal starter instrument, with just four strings, a light, easy-to-handle size, and in just one lesson you can learn a number of songs.

If you are interested in joining one of the beginners classes: email Langley.library@rochdale.gov.uk



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Roch Valley Radio is an Ofcom licensed community radio station based in Rochdale and Bury broadcasting to Rochdale, Bury, Bolton and Oldham.

Roch Valley Radio began life as three separate stations: Birch Radio at Birch Hill Hospital, Bury Lions Hospital Radio at Fairfield, and Heywood FM. Birch Radio first went on air in 1980. In 2006, the three joined forces to create Roch Valley Radio, broadcasting from Fairfield General Hospital in Bury.

The COVID-19 pandemic marked a turning point. With volunteers unable to access hospital sites, the station adapted and redefined itself as a community radio service.

The timing coincided with the end of a key era in local broadcasting. Revolution 96.2, Rochdale and Oldham's former commercial station, was sold to Bauer Media in 2020 and shut down as an independent broadcaster that November. Its replacement, Greatest Hits Radio, offered regional content but left a vacuum in genuinely local radio.

No longer limited to hospital wards, the station secured a DAB licence and expanded its reach. Due to broadcasting regulations, Ofcom classed Rochdale and Oldham as one area, and Bury and Bolton as another. That meant applying for and running two separate licences, doubling the workload for the volunteers, compliance requirements and running costs. Despite the challenge, the station pressed ahead to ensure Rochdale and Bury continued to have a local voice on the airwaves.

Alongside its growing online presence across Rochdale, Bury, Bolton, Oldham and Tameside, Roch Valley Radio also began delivering local news. Radio remained its primary focus, but the newsroom was growing.

When Rochdale Online ceased publication in early 2025, that balance shifted again. In response, Roch Valley Radio launched a daily volunteer-led news service, keeping local reporting alive across the borough at a time when independent coverage was disappearing.

By the end of 2025 reporting year, Roch Valley Radio had broadcast 4,212 hours of live radio, supported by 6,651 volunteer hours. It delivered 54 outside broadcasts, attracted over 600,000 online listening sessions, and grew its social media reach to 35.2 million views.

How To Listen

Tune in to Roch Valley Radio in your car, at home and at work, on DAB radio, as well as online through the app.

How To Get Involved

Roch Valley Radio enables the local community to get involved - from contributions to programming through to volunteering.

As a not-for-profit community radio station, Roch Valley Radio relies heavily on volunteers from presenters through to admin and production. Even if you have microphonephobia, there's still lots to get involved with outside of the studio. It's a great way to learn new skills, add experience to your CV and make new friends too.

www.rochvalleyradio.com

ACTIVE TRAVEL ROCHDALE



Active Travel Rochdale are trying to make active travel the preferred choice for as many short trips as possible.

Working alongside other boroughs in Greater Manchester, if residents throughout Rochdale borough walk, wheel and cycle more, it will benefit people's health and wellbeing, improve air quality and reduce congestion.

Each year in Greater Manchester millions of journeys by car are made that could be walked or cycled instead.

- 200 million car journeys shorter than one kilometre, the equivalent of a 15-minute walk or a four-minute bike ride.
- 800 million car journeys are under five kilometres, which is a 20-minute bike ride.

Throughout the borough, they have several activities to support walking, wheeling and cycling, including fortnightly Nature and Natter walks in Springfield Park and

monthly Ride and Stride walks from Rochdale rail station.

They have a bike library where you can hire a bike for a month for free and a secondhand bike purchase scheme for those people wanting to make a commitment to cycle more often. They run learn to ride and cycle improver sessions for children and adults as well as maintenance classes, Dr Bike sessions and holiday activities for kids.

They also have a full schools program helping to reduce the stress of the school drop off and inspire our young people to gain the skills they need to travel independently.

If you would like to get involved visit the Active Travel Eventbrite page for information on upcoming sessions:

<https://www.eventbrite.com/o/active-travel-rochdale-79480434573>

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WONDERFUL WALK

ROCHDALE'S CULTURE, MUSIC AND HISTORY CELEBRATED

Rochdale's streets were transformed into an immersive night-time light and audio experience as hundreds of residents and visitors explored the town as it's never been seen before, thanks to 'Stories We Tell: Rochdale'. Running twice nightly over two weeks, the guided audio walk performance was produced by local company Breaking Barriers as part of Rochdale's year as Greater Manchester Town of Culture, telling the story of Rochdale through real memories, voices and lived experiences of local people.

Four years on since a similar experience debuted in the town's Deeplish neighbourhood, this new edition reflected on what has changed, what has remained and tales that continue to shape Rochdale's identity. Featuring real stories, archive images, video and audio recordings shared by residents, the experience re-imagined the streets in new and unexpected ways.



Described as a 'love letter to Rochdale,' the experience began at Rochdale Railway Station with participants donning headphones and listening to powerful sounds while buildings and streets came to life. There were multiple illuminations and projections on the hour-long tour that included the hustle and bustle of Milkstone Road, Drake Street and Baillie Street, before the finale on Rochdale Town Hall Square.

Each night audiences were taken on a journey, encountering stories of belonging, change and hope, featuring voices from residents who have lived in the town for generations, alongside recent arrivals talking about the warm welcome they received, the buzz of the place, Rochdale's fascinating history (it was mentioned in the Domesday Book) and how it has changed for the better in recent years. Tales ranged from deeply moving personal accounts of how much the town and community means to them, to humorous recollections, including former mayor

*The route included a look inside
St John the Baptist Roman Catholic Church*



Rochdale Town Hall was the location for the final projection

Councillor Billy Sheerin recounting memories of living in one of the College Bank (Seven Sisters) tower blocks in the 1970s, and watching the cricket from his balcony.

The experience was complete with the sound of traffic, crowds and music, with little gems of information revealed at every turn. The route included a look inside the magnificent Grade II listed St John the Baptist Roman Catholic Church for a beautiful light show. Next there were tales of Rochdale Fire Station.

There were musical interludes by local artists including guitarist Ed Jamil, rapper Micah Stalgic and indie-folk band Syncere, outside Voltalab Music Studios on Kenion Street as visitors heard about its history between 1977- 2001 where trailblazing artists including OMD, The Stone Roses, Happy Mondays, Joy Division, Inspiral Carpets, A Certain Ratio, The Fall and many others recorded some of their most memorable work.

Stops at two stunning pieces of wall art that form part of the Common Walls mural trail were also included.

Rochdale institution San Remo, the cafe that has been in the same Italian born family for decades, also featured, along with its well-preserved menu reflecting industrial Lancastrian tastes, open for visitors to enjoy after the tour each night.

A wander along the listed buildings of 'Northern Quarter cool' Baillie Street followed with Rochdale Town Hall itself the location for the final projection, showing more local people, memories and illustrations from the town's cultural history.

ST EDMUND'S CHURCH



Built in the mid 19th century during a period when Rochdale was expanding rapidly as an industrial town, St Edmund's church is one of the borough's most significant Victorian buildings.

The church owes its existence to the Royds family, prominent local industrialists and landowners whose name is woven into the town's history.

From the outset, St Edmund's was designed to impress and inspire, a blend of Gothic revival architecture and Masonic symbolism.

By funding and supporting St Edmund's, the Royds family ensured that the church was built to endure, using quality materials and skilled workmanship. Well over a century later the building remains a powerful architectural presence.

The church continues to evolve, finding new ways to serve the community whilst honouring the past. Although there is no longer a congregation, the church hosts concerts and events.



Particular pride is taken in the church's historic organ, a rare and important instrument which has been Grade II listed by the British Institute of Organ Studies (BIOS).

The ongoing restoration of the organ is part of the broader effort to ensure that the church remains a centre for music and community life.

There are two musical events scheduled in March:

- Saturday 14 March sees the Dave Egerton Big Band in full swing mode. There will be music, dancing and a limited bar available.
- Saturday 21 March Manchester Chamber Choir will perform 'Dixit Dominus' together with Manchester Baroque Orchestra.

Both concerts will help to support the upkeep of the church.

Tickets are available via Ticketsource (search for St Edmunds Rochdale).

The church is open for visitors on the first and third Saturday of each month, beginning on Saturday 7 March, from 12 noon to 3pm.



HIGHER EDUCATION AT HOPWOOD HALL COLLEGE

There are many reasons why more and more people are choosing to study Higher Education at Hopwood Hall College.

Now, the college – which has campuses in Rochdale town centre and Middleton – is giving visitors the opportunity to see why during its upcoming Spring Open Event.

People of all ages are invited to attend the event being held from 4:30pm - 6:30pm on Wednesday 25 March.

Visitors can look forward to touring the campuses, experiencing interactive activities, speaking with tutors, and exploring the wide range of pathways available to those who are considering Higher Education.

In recent years, the college has continued to expand its offer to include university-level courses at different levels and in various fields.

Amongst them are BSc top-up degrees in Zoo Science and Wildlife Conservation, as well as Health and Social Care.

This is in addition to popular courses such as the HNC in Construction Management, the HTQ in Computing, the Foundation Degree in Sports Coaching, and more.

Hopwood promises affordable fees and small class sizes – providing a cost-effective and low-pressure alternative to traditional universities.

It's for this reason that people of all ages don't just enrol to upskill and develop their expertise, but also to change direction and retrain for an entirely new career.

Julia Heap OBE, principal and CEO of Hopwood Hall College, said: "Higher Education really can open so many doors – and that's exactly what we offer students at Hopwood.

"The learners who secure these qualifications are able to climb the career ladder much faster or carve out a new professional path.

"Be sure to join us at the open event and you'll be able to learn all about our Higher Education courses starting in September 2026."

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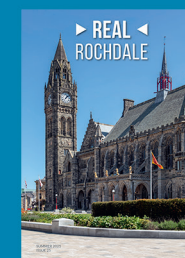
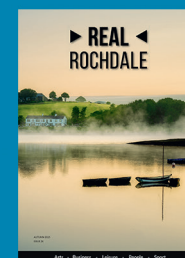
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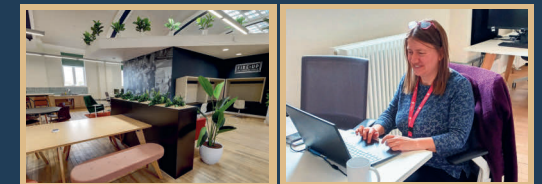
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CURTAIN THEATRE SET FOR DRAMATIC NEW LOOK

Rochdale's Curtain Theatre will be getting a new look, after plans for improvements to the exterior of the building have been revealed. The historic 180 seat theatre will soon benefit from a re-painted facade inspired by the theatre's signature red, along with new signage and exterior lighting to improve its appearance and visibility.

As well as giving the theatre, which was established in 1925, a more prominent and theatrical appearance, the aim is to encourage new audiences and improve the appearance of Milkstone Road.

Designs showing what the theatre will look like after work is complete have been produced by architects 'IF_DO', who have worked with the volunteer team at the theatre during a series of engagement workshops to develop designs that celebrate its rich theatrical history, while looking to its future.

You can find out more about the Curtain Theatre including the latest productions at:

www.curtaintheatrerochdale.uk



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ROCHDALE TOWN CENTRE REACHES RHS BRITAIN IN BLOOM UK FINALS

Rochdale town centre has been selected as a finalist in the prestigious Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) Britain in Bloom UK Finals 2026, placing the town among the very best community horticulture initiatives in the country.

The achievement recognises the ongoing partnership between Rochdale in Bloom volunteers, local community groups, businesses, Rochdale Borough Council's Environmental Management team and Rochdale Town Centre Business Improvement District (BID). Their collective efforts continue to enhance the appearance and environment of the town centre. Through seasonal planting, sustainable initiatives and projects that encourage community involvement, Rochdale has demonstrated how civic pride and environmental responsibility go hand in hand.

Michael Scott, chairman of Rochdale in Bloom, said: "We are extremely proud that Rochdale town centre has reached the UK Finals. This recognition belongs to every volunteer, partner organisation and supporter who has contributed their time, effort and enthusiasm.

"Britain in Bloom is about far more than floral displays - it reflects community pride, sustainability and the shared ambition to create welcoming green spaces for residents and visitors alike. We look forward to welcoming the RHS judges and showcasing the dedication that defines Rochdale."

The group are no strangers to the RHS Britain in Bloom finals having previously earned Gold in 2024 for Rochdale Town Centre, and Gold in 2022 and 2018 for Rochdale as Best Small City.

Roy Down, vice chairman of Rochdale in Bloom, added: "Reaching the UK Finals is a significant milestone for Rochdale. It reflects years of consistent commitment and teamwork across the borough.



"The strength of Rochdale in Bloom has always been its community spirit, and this achievement shows what can be accomplished when people work together with a shared purpose."

Philip Massey, coordinator of the Town Centre entry emphasised that co-operation is at the heart of the entry: "Our Rochdale in Bloom volunteers work together with the Town Centre BID, Rochdale Borough Council, residents and local businesses to show why our town centre is the best in the UK.

"Regeneration of Broadfield Slopes, which completed last November, is another example of our local heritage being made more accessible to residents and visitors than ever before. Our blend of historic architecture with new functional spaces, public art, and community events is unique. I can't wait to welcome the RHS judges back to Rochdale."

Judging for the 2026 UK Finals will take place later this year.

The group are seeking sponsors and volunteers to get involved, email:

chairman@rochdaleinbloom.com



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This cut embraces every woman, at every age, with every texture. It is beauty without boundaries and style without effort. Because this season, the most inspiring thing you can wear is ease.

*Hair and Photography: Gregory Couzens
Model: Debbie Thomas*





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